



# Choosing Childcare: Top Tips

## What to look for.....

Choosing childcare and early education is a big step for you and your child. There are lots of differences between types of childcare, early education or pre-school services and also between individual childminders, nurseries, nursery classes or out-of-school clubs. Try and give yourself enough time to visit several possible options in your area to get a good idea of what could suit your child. It can be a good idea to take your child with you to see how staff talk to him or her. Try to go when children are there so you can see if they are calm, happy and busy.

Here are some suggested questions to ask when you visit. Add your own questions as well:

1. How long have you been working with children?
2. How have you learned your job? Any qualifications?
3. Do you enjoy being with children and why?
4. Can I look around the building to see the rooms and outside play areas?
5. Where will my child rest?
6. What kind of food and drink will you give?
7. What will my child do all day?
8. How do you encourage good behaviour?
9. Will my child be with a regular group of children? How old are they?
10. How will you make sure I know how my child is getting on?

## Quality Pointers

When you visit possible childcare options, look for these Quality Pointers. You could add your own as well:

1. Are the children calm, safe and happy?
2. Do children play and talk together?
3. Are the staff listening to the children and answering them carefully?
4. Are the staff friendly and proud of their work?
5. Are the staff joining in with what the children are doing?
6. Are there lots of activities planned to help children learn and play? Can the children plan some of these themselves?
7. Are there plenty of clean toys and equipment for children to use?
8. Are the premises clean, well-kept and safe for children with a fun outside play area (or will children go to parks and other places regularly)?
9. Do parents have plenty of chances to say what they want for their children?
10. If there are other things you want to know, do not be afraid to ask.

## Other Fact Sheets:

- Making Childcare Choices
- Tax credits
- Early Education places for 3 and 4 year olds





All childcare and early or pre-school education services should have:

### **Trained or experienced staff**

Working with children is a skilled and demanding job. Training gives people skills and confidence. It helps staff to deliver a top quality service to your family. Many excellent childcare staff don't have formal qualifications but lots of experience and enthusiasm. Staff need:

- To respond to your child as an individual
- To plan activities and play to help your child learn
- To help your child be safe and secure
- To communicate well with your child and with you
- To respect your family's culture, religion or language
- To be enthusiastic about their important job

### **Safe and clean premises**

Children deserve comfortable, well-equipped premises which are carefully looked after. Children should be able to see toys, books and fun equipment and reach some of it themselves. Fresh, healthy food and snacks should be available.

Equipment for children with disabilities is likely to be popular with all the children. When children are asked what they like best about childcare, they often talk about their friends and the garden or outside space. Your child should be in a place which is:

- Bright and cheerful
- Clean
- Friendly for children with some child-sized equipment

### **Fun activities planned each day**

When children feel safe and happy they are learning all the time. All children learn at different rates and so activities need to be planned with the needs of each child in mind. Childcare staff should plan the day's activities before children arrive. Children enjoy making friends with other children. This is much easier if children attend the childcare service regularly and know who and what to expect each day. Make sure the childcare you choose provides plenty of encouragement for your child whatever his/her age, gender or abilities. This is because children pick up ideas about stereotyping from a very young age.

### **A big welcome for you and your child**

When you visit your childcare service, you and your child should feel welcome. Staff should find time to listen to you when you want to ask questions. They should answer any questions you have about the childcare service or about your child. Think about how your childcare service will:

- Include you in planning your child's care
- Help your child's routine- sleep, food, any special needs
- Fit in with your ideas on discipline, sweets, toilet training
- Encourage your child to feel happy and confident whatever his/her ability, race, culture, language or gender